

James Fredal, **The Enthymeme: Syllogism, Reasoning, and Narrative in Ancient Greek Rhetoric**, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020, 226 pp., \$89.95 (hardcover), \$27.99 (ebook).

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As I read ***The Enthymeme: Syllogism, Reasoning, and Narrative in Ancient Greek Rhetoric***, I could hear myself saying it. Over three decades and the boundaries of three states, in universities and community college classrooms, I could hear myself saying it. In these COVID-19 inspired days of online teaching, there are undoubtedly (and frighteningly) videos of me saying it. I refer, of course, to the widely accepted, almost universally trusted definition of an enthymeme that author James Fredal calls the “standard view,” or, more precisely, enthymeme 3.0: *An enthymeme is a syllogism in which a premise is omitted by the speaker because it is widely understood, and thus filled in, by the audience.* This understanding of the enthymeme as truncated syllogism has become so much a part of disciplinary practice that it is itself the kind of knowledge that one might expect an audience comprised of rhetoricians (not to mention their students) could serve as a suppressed premise. This premise could “elicit the unwitting participation of the audience in constructing the very argument by which they are being persuaded, achieving a shared bond—a kind of identification between speaker and listener” (p. 24).



The problem, of course, is that right after intoning these words and illustrating them with time-tested if threadbare examples, such as “Socrates is a man . . .” (readers, here, will undoubtedly know the rest), is that I was never quite sure I had ever heard one emerge from the oratorical efforts of my students. Moreover, I was not quite sure that I had ever used one myself. This was because, as the author explains, “almost everything about this view of the enthymeme is wrong. It is not faithful to Aristotle, it is not accurate as an analytical tool, and it is not useful as a productive technique” (p. 28). At least it is not just me.

And yet enthymeme 3.0, the truncated syllogism, the incomplete syllogism, and the syllogism with the suppressed premise, remains the standard view, constituting a tradition “well known and well supported in the fields of logic, argumentation theory, rhetoric, and composition and communication . . . it is taught in textbooks, advertised on rhetoric websites, applied in rhetorical criticism, and explored in scholarly research” (p. 17). In the first two chapters, the author provides, with great erudition and critical aplomb, an extended exegesis of how 3.0 came to insinuate itself into disciplinary practice. In essence, 3.0 was attractive to rhetorical scholars as it provided “both a respectable pedigree and a patina of logical rigor” (p. 27). As Fredal describes in his delightful introduction, where he imagines rhetoric as a kind of suburb to “the more important mother city dialectic . . . [a suburb] not so fine or august, its streets not so straight, its edifices not so secure

as those of the metropole," these two attributes proved almost irresistible, even if they were, as he lays out in chapter 2, so utterly mistaken (p. 2).

Indeed, it seems that in misreading Aristotle's formulation of the enthymeme, what Fredal calls enthymeme 2.0, later scholars were only continuing the mistakes made by the master himself. The author painstakingly demonstrates in chapters 3 and 4 how far Aristotle's elaboration of the enthymeme is from the practice of rhetoric as it was performed in early Greek oratory by such acclaimed rhetors as Antiphon, Demosthenes, and, perhaps most important, Lysias. The desire to transform the unruly suburb of rhetoric into something more nearly like its well-ordered neighbor dialectic led Aristotle to commit many of the same errors that we find in the enthymeme 3.0. Fredal suggests that this is "because of his [Aristotle's] commitment to dialectic and demonstration as the two valid modes of knowledge creation" (p. 79). And, here, instead of mistranslation and the weight of tradition that leads us astray in 3.0, we find that Aristotle defined 2.0 primarily through a review of sources that did not include a consideration of "rhetorical speeches at all. As will be clear to anyone who reads the *Rhetoric* with an eye to its examples and sources, Aristotle frequently uses nonrhetorical texts to illustrate his points about rhetorical artistry" (p. 79). Thus, the traditional enthymeme (3.0) attained its canonical status via a misreading of a misreading performed by Aristotle (enthymeme 2.0) of a practice that has its origins not in dialectic (that shining city on a hill), but instead:

Only when we put down the *Rhetoric* and look again does it strike us: the polis of Rhetoric—that is to say, the practice of ancient Greek rhetorical artistry—does remind us of a place. Not of Dialectic but of a city much less regular, larger, more populous, more famous, and much older. If ancient rhetoric is a foreign country, we'll recognize it not as a colony of Dialectic but as a suburb of Narrative. (p. 4)

And it is to that older, perhaps shabbier, perhaps less well-mannered, province of narrative that Fredal guides us to search for the original enthymeme, the enthymeme 1.0: "The Greek rhetorical agon—rhetorical artistry and the rhetorical appeals, including logoi—are all organized around storytelling and that the enthymeme is a central feature of rhetorical narrative" (p. 88). Here, in chapters 5–7, the noun *enthymeme* becomes the verb *enthymizing* and the effect transforms rhetorical practice in two directions: First, "it will remind us that enthymizing is something that speakers and audiences do—it is performed and experienced—more than it is a linguistic or logical structure on the page or in the mind" (p. 89), and more important, "it will remind us that oratory is not theory, logic, or even merely an argument but is primarily a narrative contest" (p. 89). This is the enthymeme that found its home in the courts and deliberative bodies of Athens and is practiced by such rhetorical experts as Lysias, to whom Fredal turns for an extensive analysis in the final chapters of this work to demonstrate how deeply embedded the enthymeme was in the narratives that constituted the shared lifeworld of the Athenian polis.

This is a work that should be read not just by the aforementioned scholars and teachers of public speaking, composition, and argumentation, but by all of us who are concerned about the boundaries between dialectical center and the rhetorical or communicative periphery. As I read Fredal's claims for the narrative basis of the enthymeme, I was reminded of Critchley's (2019) latest work, *Tragedy, the Greeks, and Us*, in which he claims,

Any strong monolithic conception of reason, capital *R*, must be abandoned and we must accept that reasoning is always a two-sided process of fragile negotiation in a world of constitutive and irreducible violence. This also means that accepting that reason is essential, but essentially limited in its power, that it requires the use of rhetoric and persuasion. (p. 26)

In other words, it is not only rhetoricians that inhabit the meandering roads of the suburbs of narrative, but also the poets, and especially the tragedians, who find their homes outside the walls of dialectic. Perhaps, if Fredal's work has the influence I believe it ought to on the pedagogical practices of rhetoricians, then we might even find that ours is not some periphery to a dialectic center, but, in fact, a metropolis every bit as vibrant and grand, though also more human in scale with all that it entails. Its virtues may not be as obvious, but given time we may find our home in it. At the very least, it would not be dull.

Reference

Critchley, S. (2019). *Tragedy, the Greeks, and us*. New York, NY: Pantheon.